

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President

September 25, 2023

via TEAMS

Members Present:

Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Megan Atkinson, Teddy Burch, Steve Canfield, Scott Christen, Melissa Comer, Kris Craven, Mark Creter, April Crockett, Andrew Donadio, Dennis Fennewald, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steve Frye, Syed Hasan, Samantha Hutson, Christy Killman, Matthew Langford, Jane Liu, Mark Loftis, Jeannette Luna, Jennifer Mabry, Twanelle Majors, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Holly Mills, Wendy Mullen, Michael Natrass, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Hyewon Park, Mustafa Rajabali, Richard Rand, Steven Seiler, Lee Ann Shipley, Scott Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Leslie Suters, Kyle Turner, Hannah Upole, Brenda Wilson, Kimberly Winkle

Members Absent:

Yun Ding, Krystal Kennedy, Richard Le Borne, Joseph Ojo, Christopher Reames, Troy Smith, Amber Spears, Lenly Weathers

Guests Present:

Lee Wray

Senate President Allen called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

Remarks by President Oldham

The recent Family Weekend was a great success with a wonderful atmosphere, environment, and energy. There were roughly 10,000 attendees at the football game. This year's marching band is the largest ever. The semester is going well so far, and Preview Day is around the corner with a record number of RSVPs (900, representing 2700 attendees).

The President addressed the list of concerns submitted by the Faculty Senate with Q and A for each topic.

1. Regarding construction on campus:

Oldham: All are on schedule, subject to the weather.

a. What is the timeline for completion of current projects?

Oldham:

- The Islam building is slated to be completed in early April.
- The Peachtree project is on schedule, and some portions were expedited (10th St. opening to the Henderson/Farr lot), though that area may be closed temporarily around Christmas for paver installation.
- Johnson Hall's design is complete and is in the fundraising process to meet targets.
- The ACME Building is in the final design stages.

Senators' Concerns:

Shutting down William L. Jones's access to that lot will hamper east-west travel and limit accessible parking. The President shared that the Master Plan shows there will be no more parking in front of Derryberry and this meets that goal, and that accessible parking will be configured off of Dixie Avenue.

b. Construction delays are inevitable, but are they factored into the planning process?

Oldham: Yes and no; it is hard to plan for all possibilities, but crews are going to great lengths to catalog and diagram underground services and structures for future projects.

Senator's Concerns:

Q: What is the plan/timeline for replacement/additional parking?

A: The Master Plan shows the removal of most internal campus traffic, which means parking moves to the perimeter. As a result, shuttle routes have been upgraded. There is enough parking, and more may be considered behind Foundation Hall. The possibility of garages is still in consideration, but it depends on what most people want and wish to pay for.

Q: Are there liability concerns for those crossing the railroad from Foundation, west toward campus?

A: Working to secure safe passage there has been difficult as it requires partnering. The university is working with TDOT to get a roundabout at the Willow Avenue/University Drive intersection, which will help slow cars and aid pedestrian safety. The university is also working with the city to make sure Dixie Avenue is safe for pedestrians.

Q: Doesn't the future traffic pattern divide the campus east and west?

A: There is still an east/west passage via A/B and 7th Streets, but the center will become pedestrian-only.

Q: Can the new construction support and make space for emergency and service vehicles?

A: Yes

Q: Will the gravel parking on the west side along Willow be eventual permanent parking?

A: The new residence hall will take a portion, but nothing will be known for at least 1-2 years.

Q: Is adding some green space to create more green space fiscally responsible?

A: We are still designing and always have concerns.

Q: Scooters and wheeled personal transportation devices are becoming a safety concern. Will this be addressed?

A: We have policies but they need a fresh look or need to be enforced if they are not. The Cabinet will review these policies. Personal transportation devices are supported but must be managed safely with regard to others.

Comment: Some students are asking to leave classes early because other instructors insist people are on time.

Comment: Some students are riding their devices in the buildings and leaving them in common areas/walkways.

A: The Cabinet will work on these policy updates; riding inside a building is not okay, but on campus is.

Comment: We must address this quickly and provide places for these devices to be ridden.

A: We will work on this quickly.

2. The nuclear engineering program:

a. Moving along quickly, but at what cost?

Oldham: There are new hires funded.

b. Is it true faculty lines from other departments on campus have been taken to create this new program? Why not just create new faculty lines because if it is successful and we have more students come to campus, those lines taken from other departments may need to be filled to meet demand?

Oldham: No lines have been shifted to the nuclear program to his knowledge, only new monies are being used.

Q: Where are the lines being funded?

A: There is anticipated money coming in and other allocations have been made.

c. Why are new programs being prioritized over established programs that are trying to grow, e.g., prioritizing nuclear engineering over adding a new astronomy/astrophysics concentration in Physics?

Oldham: Not aware of any competition between new programs. Generally, programs are evaluated on several criteria, such as labor demand for the skill, good fit for TTU, available resources, etc. Based on analysis, there were not a lot of nuclear programs available, and while initially hesitant, the President was encouraged by the government and the minimal financial risk. The President encourages all-new program ideas to be submitted for analysis of viability.

Q: But why are we losing lines in programs that are trying to maintain a standard (not grow), while new programs are getting lines?

A: This is common for all universities; there must be ways to resource growing programs or maintain existing standards for programs. If there is underperformance, that may mean resources get shifted to areas of greater need.

3. Regarding nuclear engineering and the effects of its creation: Physics is receiving a \$270,000 gift over three years (\$90,000 per year) for an astronomy facility at Tech Farm. \$20,000 of this gift has already been received. At the same time, Physics has an open tenure-track line from a recent retirement (John Shriner), and they requested filling the line with a tenure-track astronomy/astrophysics faculty. The request was denied by the Provost. At the same time, Physics is also being asked to assist with developing the new nuclear engineering program. How are donations and responsibilities toward our donors considered when selecting which programs are funded and positions filled? Is there sufficient communication across the Foundation and the Provost's office to ensure that donors know how their contributions will be valued (or not valued) against other programs?

Oldham: When industry leaders indicate they “would hire every nuclear graduate” for example, that is compelling, as well as all factors of analysis, and fiscal realities based on interest. Planning can help make things happen,

Q: But what about donor monies for specific programs?

A: That would be a conversation for the Dean and Provost.

Q: Physics donation is an annual occurrence, and we serve a lot of campus. With a line being cut, how are we to do the same with less manpower?

A: Continue to plan and articulate needs and mission and find support.

4. **Parking:**

a. First, parking hang tags can be considered like a concert ticket. When someone purchases a ticket to be on the floor of the arena in front of the stage but is turned away because it is full, there is most usually a disgruntled concertgoer who either demands their seat or their money back. In the same vein, at the price we are paying for parking, is it true more gold hang tags were sold than parking spots?

Oldham: All permit levels are oversold because not all permit holders are present at the same time. Designating spots would mean some spots would sit empty when others could use them

b. Many faculty, staff, and students have no choice in how they get to work or school and must afford a parking pass. Has an accounting analysis been done on the fees?

Oldham: Funds area analyzed often.

c. How have fees gone up compared to salaries or tuition? We know Parking Services allows for a reduction in the fee based on salary but for some, it is demeaning to have to ask for relief. Comment?

Oldham: No one has to request a discount; certain salary levels mean an automatic discounted permit rate.

d. Finally, what is the budget for Parking Services and how does its budget compare to other services on campus, like the police? Where does the ticket money go?

Oldham: Annual parking revenue is \$1.5M. \$.5M goes to operating (parking services, shuttle), and \$1M goes to debt service on parking and facilities (maintenance, repair, paving, etc.).

Q: Would bike rentals be an option?

A: We used to do this and need to look into it. Open to new/better ways to get around campus.

5. **Compensation study:**

a. When will Mercer be finished with their consulting?

Oldham: Not sure of the exact date, but the final report is expected before the end of the year with a draft by the end of the semester.

b. Where is the 2% to increase salaries going to come from in the budget?

Oldham: Already built into our budget; 5% salary appropriations by the Board of Trustees in June were used (3% for merit raises in August, 2% used for the study).

c. Regardless of their report, is there a plan or has there been discussion by the administration and HR to increase staff pay and deal with the salary inversions across

campus? To have an assistant professor hired at a pay higher than a full professor or a lecturer above a senior lecturer is disheartening.

Oldham: This is a regular occurrence and we attempt to correct issues as quickly as possible. Though it is part of the study, we take care of this issue anyway.

Q: What is “quickly?”

A: Usually within one budget cycle but depends on the magnitude of the issue.

Comment: It doesn’t always happen as you imply.

Comment: What is the procedure for requesting an inversion review? Some things may get solved with Mercer, but if not, what is the procedure?

A: The Mercer study will help identify some things, but make sure Deans know priorities. Awareness starts at the department level.

Q: I went from instructor to Ph.D. level faculty; I am not inverted, but am paid the same as people with a lower rank. Will the study reveal things like this?

A: It should help, but it is not looking at individual salaries and is more looking at disciplines. Stay aware individually because no mechanism can catch every instance of inversion or rank/pay issues.

6. The Bend church has been seen every Sunday on campus since July, so much so that it appears Tech is affiliated with The Bend.

- a. Please share the details of the contract between Tech and The Bend church.
- b. How long will they be using Derryberry and Farr and for how much money?
- c. Is this rental agreement with the church compliant with our policies, like minors on campus, and how is it checked?
- d. Where does this rent money go?
- e. Was it agreed upon in the contract to have baptisms outside?
- f. If the University can find available space for a church, why can they not find space for student organizations?

Oldham: The contract was created per policy, but there are concerns with the group. The university is working with them to ensure compliance. The contract is up in December as Derryberry comes offline for renovations.

7. Prorated summer pay: When faculty work during the summer, it is outside of the contract and there appear to be no particular policies on summer classes or compensation. Currently, if someone’s class size is below their threshold of enrollment to get 150% of the cost for the class, that faculty member’s summer pay is prorated to match the number of students enrolled. Unfortunately, though, this prorating system is also used for graduate classes as well, of which very few ever have an enrollment near the threshold.

- a. Could graduate classes be excluded or have an adjusted threshold rating?
- b. If a faculty member has exceeded their threshold for one class but is slightly under in another, could the average threshold be considered?
- c. Could this threshold system be implemented uniformly across campus? There seem to be varying methods of accounting from department to department.

Oldham: Many options could work but also present challenges; this issue should be taken up with the Provost.

8. Graduate students in the College of Business would like to know whether the December graduation for them is in the morning or afternoon. When asked, the Office of Communications and Marketing responded that they do not know and will not know until the end of October. With graduations being on a Friday, students and their families have to plan for travel, childcare, and the like. With the historic pattern of the number of graduates and which college graduates at what time, why the delay?

Oldham: Graduation ceremonies are based on the number of anticipated graduates; planning is done to optimize ceremonies so they will be full and balanced but still a great experience. Families get roughly one month's notice at present.

Comment: The university should decide earlier even if not optimal.

A: Don't underestimate the need based on optimizing planning; for example, we moved to Fridays because of the large number of staff needed to run the ceremonies.

Comment: Moving to Fridays helped with employee attendance.

Comment: It's more about knowing early than which day it happens on.

Senate President Allen reminded senators of the upcoming Board of Trustees breakfast and that our next business meeting is on October 23.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:16 p.m.

Approved: 10/23/2023